

RIVER INFORMATION

Headwaters of the Upper North Platte River originate in the mountains ringing North Park, Colorado, and join numerous other tributary streams before forming the river as recreationists know it near the Colorado-Wyoming border. At the first major boat access point (known as Routt), the elevation is 7,900 feet above sea level. Near Saratoga, Wyoming, the elevation is 6,800 feet and at the backwaters of Seminole Reservoir, the river's first impoundment, the elevation is about 6,300 feet.

The gradient in the upper part of the river, where the steep walls of Northgate Canyon contain a narrow, high velocity section that drops an average of 40 feet per mile.

After leaving the canyon, the river widens into the gentle slopes of the foothills of the Medicine Bow and Sierra Madre mountains, then takes on a steadily increasing meander and more gentle gradient as it flows through the agricultural Saratoga and Encampment valleys. Numerous tributary streams enter the Platte, adding varying amounts of water to its flow as it progresses downstream toward Seminole Reservoir.

BE PREPARED

Much of the Upper North Platte River floating season is during May and June, when air and water temperatures are cold and can create dangerous conditions for floaters. If you must float a river when the water is very cold, equip yourself properly and protect yourself against the hazards of cold water. Some protection against the consequences of cold-water immersion may be obtained by wearing protective clothing. Waterproof outer wear helps against wind chill and spray. A neoprene wet suit, drysuit, and insulating layers (wool or synthetics - NO COTTON) worn under them, and an appropriately rated, sized and fastened life jacket (PFD) are recommended as the best protection for minimizing the effects of exposure to cold water. Keep changes of clothing and matches dry by storing in waterproof river bags attached to the boat to prevent being lost in a capsized. Waterproof match containers carried in the pocket are also advisable in case of separation from your boat and gear. Know the signs of and treatment for hypothermia and act early to prevent dangerously cold body temperatures.

FLOATING THE RIVER

All of the Upper North Platte River is floatable - over 124.2 miles of free-flowing water from the boulder-strewn, torrential whitewater of Northgate Canyon near the state line, through the rolling agricultural lands of the Saratoga and Encampment valleys, down to the placid waters and sagebrush hills near Interstate Highway 80. Due to its variable nature, the river offers numerous boating experiences ranging from whitewater thrills to leisurely drifting. The strategically placed access points offer the choice of float trips ranging from a few hours to three or four days.

Experience and skill are the best guides to floating the river. It is not advisable for the novice boatman to challenge Northgate Canyon. If in doubt about your abilities in handling whitewater, seek the services of one of the professional guide services that are available.

Typical floating craft on the Upper North Platte River include flatbottom or drift boats, inflatable rafts, canoes, and kayaks. Flatbottom and drift boats, generally used by anglers and fishing outfitters, are useful in the river from Pickaroon campground downstream. Adventurous canoeists can begin floats as far upstream as Six Mile Gap. Rafts are used on all sections of the river, and along with kayaks are the typical method used in floating the "whitewater sections." Boat motors are prohibited on upstream sections of the Upper North Platte River, both in the Platte River Wilderness and below the Wilderness as far downstream as the bridge at the Saratoga Resort and Spa (formerly Saratoga Inn).

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS

In Wyoming, THE WATER OVER PRIVATE LAND IS PUBLIC - where the river flows over PRIVATE land, the river banks and the land under the river are considered PRIVATE. Leaving your boat for any reason could result in trespass on private lands. Watch for blue Bureau of Land Management and Game and Fish Department signs along the Upper North Platte River and Encampment River, which indicate public lands or easements. Blue 12x12" squares indicate you are entering public land or an easement where fishing or landing are legal. Red signs indicate you are entering private lands where you must stay in your boat. A portion of the river is in a wilderness area. The use of motor-powered watercraft is prohibited within a wilderness area (36 CFR 261.16), including the Platte River Wilderness in Colorado and Wyoming between the Routt Access and Pickaroon, Pikepole and Prospect Access points. Also, use of motorized watercraft is prohibited on the North Platte River downstream from the Wilderness to the Saratoga Inn Bridge in Carbon County. Consult current Wyoming Fishing Regulations.

FISHING EASEMENTS

Easements are the purchase of certain rights for public use on private lands and are typically purchased unto perpetuity (such as a "permanent easement"). They vary according to what rights the particular landowner at the time of purchase would sell. Usually, these rights include road access, parking areas, and the right to walk along the banks within a specified distance from the water's edge. On the Upper North Platte River these range from midstream to 50 and 100 feet along the banks above the highwater line to an unspecified width as indicated on the map. All of the easements include the right to fish and some include the right to hunt waterfowl. Overnight camping may be limited or not allowed in some areas.

Easements are shown on this map by red arrowed lines that indicate the width and extent of each easement. For more information regarding the permitted rights on a particular easement, contact the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.



LEAVE NO TRACE ON THE RIVER

When you launch yourself and your craft onto the Upper North Platte, you become a part of the river. You are instantly free of the noise and bustle of work-a-day life by joining with the river and its natural environment. Enjoy your trip, and do your part to ensure that the solitude which you see, hear, and feel be retained for future generations of visitors. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management encourage use of "Leave No Trace" principles for backcountry and river users. By virtue of their construction, floating craft typically leave no trace of their passage, but you can ensure that the pristine beauty of the Upper North Platte River is protected while on shore and traveling through with these principles:

Plan Ahead and Prepare -- Know the weather forecast, the river, and locations of public and private land.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces -- Camp in developed and designated campsites when available.

Dispose of Waste Properly -- Pack it in, pack it out, and dispose of human waste and wash water properly.

Leave What You Find -- Leave archeological and historic sites undisturbed and leave vegetation intact.

Minimize Campfire Impacts -- Use established fire rings, break down new fire rings, and carry out ashes.

Respect Wildlife -- Use bear-proof food storage practices, observe wildlife from a distance, control pets.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors -- Consider that campsites may be crowded, and respect private lands.

All river users can make a difference in the future of the Upper North Platte River by taking a personal role in preserving this pristine, wild river experience for themselves and for future generations.

THE FISHERY

The Upper North Platte River is known nationally for its high-quality trout angling. In Wyoming, the river from the mouth of Sage Creek upstream to the Colorado-Wyoming state line is classified as blue ribbon trout water and the entire river is managed for "wild" trout. Wild rainbow and brown trout coexist as the primary game fish with lesser populations of brook trout, cutthroat trout, and walleye.

The many tributary streams flowing into the river provide the spawning habitat and nursery areas necessary for natural reproduction of spring spawning rainbow and fall spawning brown trout.

Nongame fish in the river include longnose and white suckers, longnose dace, darters and occasional carp, and creek chubs.

A Wyoming fishing license is required to fish in Wyoming. Special regulations apply on specific river reaches. Refer to the fishing regulations available through any license selling agent and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

A Colorado fishing license and adherence to Colorado special regulations are necessary for wade-fishing at Routt Access and for float-fishing the first 4.8 river miles downstream of the Routt Access. Northgate floaters who intend to fish should be careful to have appropriate licenses for both states or be aware of the state boundary just downstream of the Tepee Campsite.

WILDLIFE

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is responsible for the management of the fishery and wildlife resources along the river in Wyoming.

Numerous species of wildlife inhabit the area along the river and many species may be seen within the river corridor.

Elk are abundant in the mountains and the river canyon provides critical winter range for this species. Bighorn sheep are found from the Northgate Canyon downstream to Bennett Peak. Numerous mule deer and a few white-tailed deer can be seen along the river. Pronghorn antelope utilize the open valleys and foot hill areas. Blue grouse broods are found along the forested portions of the river in summer, and sage grouse are present in the sagebrush/shortgrass prairie adjacent to the river.

The riparian vegetation along the banks hosts numerous passerine birds and plays a vital part in providing habitat for all species of animals and cover for fish. Several species of raptors are common along the Upper NorthPlatte River. Golden eagles, bald eagles, prairie falcons, American kestrels, red-tailed hawks, Swainson's hawks, and ferruginous hawks are frequently observed along the river. Waterfowl are abundant. Canada geese, mallards, goldeneye, and common mergansers can be encountered in the river by boaters during any part of the floating season. Birds such as the great blue heron, pelican, and kingfisher can be seen feeding on small fish among the pools and backwater areas. The common dipper or water ouzel frequents the pools and faces along rocky portions of the Upper North Platte River and in the tributary streams.

NORTHGATE CANYON RAPIDS RATING

Rapid Rating System

(I) Very Easy:

Waves small regular, passages clear, very little maneuvering; riffles.

(II) Easy:

Rapids of medium difficulty, some maneuvering necessary; low ledges, slow rock gardens, medium regular waves.

(III) Medium:

Waves numerous, high irregular; rocks, strong eddies, passages clear through narrow, expertise in maneuvering required, inspection necessary the first time.

(IV) Difficult:

Long rapids, waves powerful, irregular; dangerous rocks, boiling eddies, inspection usually necessary; powerful and precise maneuvering required; maximum safety precautions necessary.

(V) Very Difficult:

Very large irregular waves, critical complex maneuvering required; maximum safety precautions necessary. Risk to boat and life; limits of controlled navigation.

(VI) Limits:

Navigation severe, risk to life and boat; rarely, if ever, run.

River Flow Levels

Below 900 cubic feet/second

Very marginal for rafts; small rafts and kayaks may be OK down to 800 cfs or so; depends on skill level and knowledge of river.

900 - 1200 cfs

OK for kayaks, smaller oar boats, and paddle boats. Not advised for loaded oar boats (gear boats).

1200 - 2500 cfs

Good water levels for all rafts - a very technical and difficult run.

2500 - 2900 cfs

Getting pretty fast - still suitable for paddle boats.

Above 2900 cfs

Very significant and dangerous at this point! Water levels about 2900 cfs DEMAND expert experience and maneuvering ability for a successful and safe river trip. Advised for very experienced oar boats and kayakers only.

	1000 cfs	2000 cfs	3000 + cfs
Windy Hole Rapids	II	III	IV
Cowpie Rapids	III	III	III
Narrow Falls Rapids	III	IV	IV
Tootsie Roll Rapids	III	III	IV
Stovepipe Rapids	III	III	III